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## SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP AMONG BABONGO IN SOUTHERN GABON

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**ABSTRACT** Largely because the Babongo in central and southern Gabon sedentarized and adopted agriculture, they have not attracted much attention of researchers who are interested in hunting-gathering activities and relationships with the natural environment. Many aspects of their livelihood and social life still remain unclear. This article, therefore, describes and analyzes Babongo settlement distribution, residential pattern, subsistence and economic activities, residential mobility, visiting activities and social relationships based on quantitative data collected in the field. In particular, their sedentary lifestyle and social relationships are discussed, focusing on the interethnic relationship with the neighboring Massango farmers.

**Key Words:** Gabon; Babongo; Massango; Sedentarization; Interethnic relations; Assimilation.

### INTRODUCTION

The forest peoples<sup>(1)</sup> who inhabit the central African tropical forests have lived by hunting-gathering while moving from camp to camp with fluctuating memberships (Turnbull, 1961; Ichikawa, 1983; Kitanishi, 1995; Yasuoka, 2006). However, their lifestyle has been greatly changing today. They have begun to live sedentarily along the roadside in rectangular mud-huts similar to those of the neighboring farmers instead of in their traditional semi-spherical, leaf-and-twigs huts (Sato, 1992). Their subsistence activities have also shifted from hunting-gathering to cultivation (Sato, 1992; Kitanishi, 2003).

These changes are also developing among the Babongo, one of the forest peoples who inhabit the central and southern Gabon, situated in the central African equatorial region (Knight, 2003). There are several such forest peoples in Gabon: the Baka in the north, the Bakola (Bakoya) in the northeast, the Bagama and the Barimba in the southwest and the Babongo in the center and south (Mayer, 1987; Bahuchet, 1993; Knight, 2003).

The Baka in the north probably migrated from southern Cameroon in the last century (Bahuchet, 1993). The Bakola are originally from northwestern Congo (Sato, 1992; Knight, 2003), whereas the Babongo are said to have long settled in the present location, even before the Bantu expansion.

Anderson (1983) described the lifestyle of the Babongo in the first half of the 20th century. According to this description, many Babongos in the 1930s had lived in round dome-shaped huts deep in the forest far from farmer settlements located along the road. Although some Babongos had settled near the road and practiced agriculture, they went into the forest on long-term foraging expeditions in the dry season, because their agricultural products were

not sufficient to sustain their life.

In the end of the 1940s, a remarkable change in their lifestyle took place. When neighboring farmer groups came to settle near the newly constructed roads, the Babongo followed them and established sedentary settlements next to the farmers. Then the importance of agriculture increased rapidly. Thus, the Babongo can be regarded as a hunter-gatherer group which changed to a sedentary lifestyle and started agriculture relatively earlier than other forest peoples.

Although the Babongo are unique among the forest peoples, few studies on their life and society were conducted until recently. Since the Babongo have highly sedentarized and embraced agriculture to a great extent, they have not attracted much attention of researchers who are interested in the foraging lifestyles and relationships with forest environments (Bahuchet, 1993). After a long dearth of information available, Knight (2003) surveyed the forest peoples in Gabon and reported that the Babongo lived much sedentarily, depending on agricultural products. She pointed out several factors for their earlier sedentarization; the government policy in the colonial and the post-independence era, the penetration of road networks and modern cash economy, and the influence of conservation activities. While her study provides us with important data based on extensive surveys combined with census data and archival information, many aspects on the actual situation of their livelihood and social life remain unclear.

This article, therefore, describes and analyzes the Babongo's livelihood and social relationships, based on my long-term intensive field research on a particular group of the Babongo in southern Gabon, with particular emphasis on the Babongo's sedentary life and their social relationships built on such a lifestyle. I also discuss the characteristics of Babongo as "the forest people" focusing on their relationships with the Massango, the Bantu farmers who inhabit the same region.

## DISTRIBUTION AND RESIDENTIAL PATTERN

I conducted an extensive survey on the Gabonese forest peoples from October to December 2002; the Baka around Minkébé National Park and Minvoul area in the north, the Bakola around Mékambo in the northeast, and the Babongo around Mimongo in the south (Fig. 1). I also conducted an intensive survey on the Babongo around Boutoumbi (Department of Ogoulou, Province of Ngounié) in southern Gabon for nine months; July to October 2003, November 2004 to February 2005, and May to August 2005. The distribution of villages around Boutoumbi is shown in Fig. 2. I have combined the data from these surveys with those of Knight (2003) to make an updated list of the Babongo settlements with their residential pattern in this region (Table 1). Most of these settlements are found along the roads, except for those situated in the mountain forest, such as Etéké (No. 6-9) and Ibounji (No. 18, 19). All of these roadside

settlements are not temporary camps, but stable villages. The average settlement size is 17.0 huts or 52.0 persons (n=28, excluding No. 11 with only three Babongo live in a large farmer village). There are well-established settlements in the densely populated areas around Franceville in southwestern Gabon (No. 25-29). The huts in these settlements are rectangular-shaped, wattle-and-daub with mud walls and tin roofs or with raffia leaf thatch. Dome-shaped huts with leaf thatch are not seen.

Throughout the region, the Babongo live in the same village with the Bantu peoples who are distributed in the same area. In a village, relatives often have huts in close proximity which make up distinct Babongo clusters within the village. However, it does not mean that the Babongo are spatially segregated from the neighboring Bantu people. In some villages, the clusters of the Babongo and the Bantu farmers are located next to each other in a mosaic fashion.

For the present study, I compared the Babongo data with those on the Bakola in northeastern Gabon (obtained from my fieldwork in 2002), the Baka in Congo (Sato, 1992), Baka in Cameroon (obtained from my fieldwork in 2005), and Baka in Gabon (Mve, 2001; Knight, 2003; and data obtained from my 2002 fieldwork; Tables 2 & 3). The Bakola are migrants from Congo. They now live in the border area of Gabon and Congo, still maintaining a certain degree of communication with Bakola populations in Congo. For their residential pattern, the Bakola have developed settlements similar to the Babongo's. Their average settlement size is relatively large: 89.0 persons (n=10, No.75 is divided into two parts). Their social status also resembles that of the Babongo in that the relationship with the neighboring farmers is not discriminatory.

The Baka have developed a sedentary lifestyle, as already reported on the Baka groups in Congo and Cameroon. The average settlement size of the Baka in these three countries is 44.9 persons (n=36). The Baka in Gabon, however, tend to spend their life more in the forest, compared with the Babongo and the Bakola in the same country. Some of their settlements are situated on hills (No. 62) and the riverside (No. 56, 57, 60, 61) in the forest, and are inaccessible by car. In the villages I surveyed (No. 45-63), there were dome-shaped huts built with twigs and leaves (No. 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 61, 63). Here, the relationship with the neighboring farmers seemed to be unequal and the distinction between the two groups was clearer than that among the Babongo and Bakola.

All of the settlements I surveyed in southeastern Cameroon (No. 45-55) consisted of the Baka alone, and were situated at a distance of a few hundred meters from the farmer villages. Such separation was also observed in the Baka settlements in Gabon (No. 57, 58, 60, 63). Where a small number of farmers live in the same village as the Baka (No. 61, 62), the farmers do so for practical reasons, such as the convenience of cultivation and watching over their plantations.

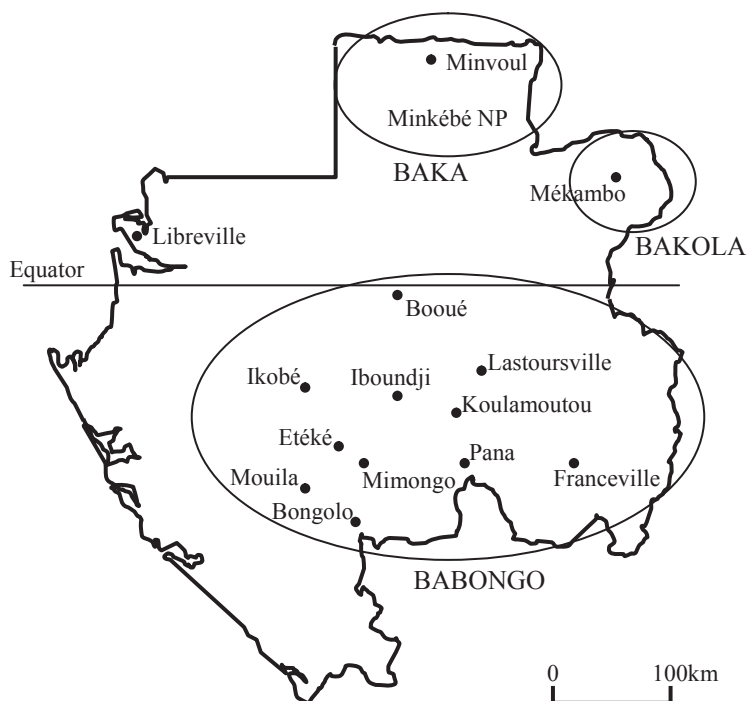


Fig. 1. Distribution of Three Ethnic Groups of Forest Peoples in Gabon.

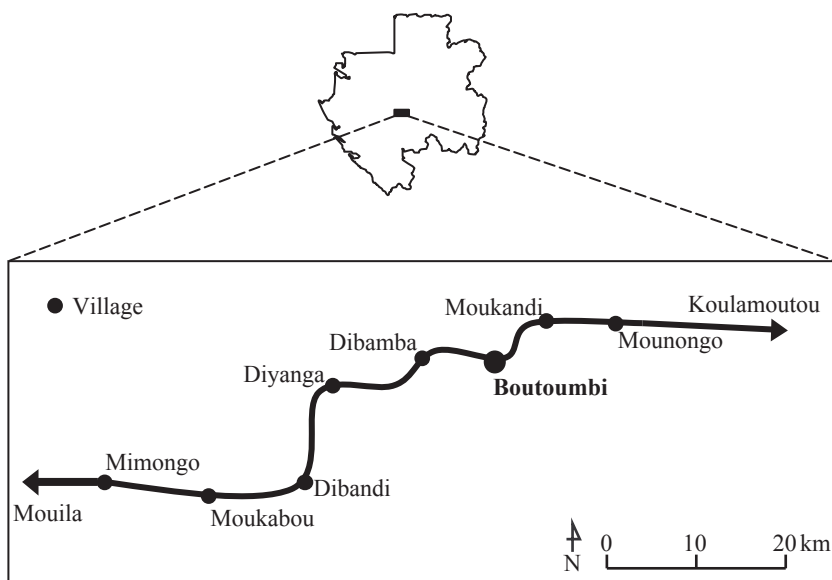


Fig. 2. Research Area.

Table 1. Settlement Size and Distribution of the Babongo.

Site No.	Village	Region	Latitude and longitude	Roadside / Forest	Settlement Type	No. of Huts	Population of the Babongo	Neighboring Groups	Total Population	Date	Source
1	Traquil	Ikobé	1.04 S, 11.06 E	Road	Village	7	27			2002	1
2	Mimongo		1.13 S, 11.21 E	Road	Village	10	25	Mitsogho		2002	1
3	Mutombi		1.13 S, 11.21 E	Road	Village	12	10			2002	1
4	Iyawa		2.37 S, 11.62 E	Forest	Camp	3	15			1998	1
5	Matare Mitsingui	Bongolo	2.36 S, 11.64 E	Road	Village	15	54	Nzebi		1998	1
6	Boundji		1.10 S, 11.41 E	Forest	Village	15	74			1997	1
7	Veda	Etéké	1.15 S, 11.45 E	Forest	Camp	6	34			1997	1
8	Mogoko		1.19 S, 11.52 E	Forest	Camp	8	26	Mitsogho		1997	1
9	Mutada		1.26 S, 11.59 E	Forest	Village	21	77			1997	1
10	Mimongo		1.62 S, 11.60 E	Road	Village	10	30			2002	2
11	Moukabou	Mimongo	1.62 S, 11.67 E	Road	Village	(1)	(3)	Massango, Mitsogho	570	2002	2
12	Dibandi		1.59 S, 11.72 E	Road	Village	(15)	50		300	2002	2
13	Diyanga		1.51 S, 11.72 E	Road	Village	55	70		170	2002	2
14	Dibamba		1.50 S, 11.77 E	Road	Village	22	50	Massango	100	2005	2
15	Boutoumbi		1.47 S, 11.81 E	Road	Village	7	30		30	2005	2
16	Moukandi		1.47 S, 11.85 E	Road	Village	35	100		200	2005	2
17	Misangalani	Lopé / Booué	0.37 S, 11.79 E	Road	Village	26	28	?		2002	1
18	Mukngami		1.20 S, 11.79 E	Forest	Village	11	46			1998	1
19	Diyanga	Mt. Iboundji	1.23 S, 11.83 E	Forest	Village	12	39	?		1998	1
20	Mayela, Buyabe	Pana	1.52 S, 12.58 E	Road	Village	8	29	?		1998	1
21	Lipaka I	Lastoursville	0.97 S, 12.82 E	Road	Village	7	10			1998	1
22	Lipaka II		1.02 S, 12.84 E	Road	Village	12	58			1998	1
23	Tsati		1.03 S, 12.86 E	Road	Village	4	19	?		1998	1
24	Manamana		1.05 S, 12.88 E	Road	Village	8	35			1998	1
25	Binga I		1.63 S, 13.45 E	Road	Village	28	79			1998	1
26	Mouyabi	Franceville	2.24 S, 13.58 E	Road	Village	21	71			1998	1
27	Kasielli I, Kebaga		1.21 S, 13.90 E	Road	Village	58	129	Batéké		1998	1
28	Kasielli II, Kebaga		1.22 S, 13.90 E	Road	Village	78	174			1998	1
29	Ekalla I		1.37 S, 14.14 E	Road	Village	34	66			1998	1

ave. 17.0 ave. 52.0 (Excluding No.11)

Source 1: Knight (2003); 2: Matsuura (present study).

**Table 2.** Settlement Size and Distribution of the Baka.

Site No.	Village	Region	Roadside / Forest	Settlement Type	Population of the Baka	Neighboring Groups	Total Population	Date	Source
30	Asmindele	Congo Northwest	Road	Village	7	Bakwélé Jem Fang		1987	1
31	Kabosu		Road	Village	14			1987	1
32	Makka II		Road	Village	18			1987	1
33	Mengelekum		Road	Village	18			1987	1
34	Ntam		Road	Village	19			1987	1
35	Mekomu		Road	Village	24			1987	1
36	Diegoi		Forest	Camp	29			1987	1
37	Bam II		Road	Village	34			1987	1
38	Mesumsum		Road	Village	40			1987	1
39	Djampouo		Road	Village	56			1987	1
40	Makka II		Road	Village	58			1987	1
41	Betani		Road	Village	64			1987	1
42	Bammagod		Road	Village	84			1987	1
43	Beyambeya		Road	Village	87			1987	1
44	Gomani		Road	Village	112			1987	1
45	Dissassoui	Cameroon Southeast	Road	Village	151	Bangando	151	2005	2
46	Bélinguengi		Road	Village	19		19	2005	2
47	Paka		Road	Village	31		31	2005	2
48	Sépa		Road	Village	79		79	2005	2
49	Koumela		Road	Village	21		150	2005	2
50	Soukambo		Road	Village	29		29	2005	2
51	Véténe		Road	Village	19		19	2005	2
52	Sawi		Road	Village	35		35	2005	2
53	Milieu		Road	Village	24		24	2005	2
54	Mbanda		Road	Village	34		34	2005	2
55	Bonbola		Road	Village	28		28	2005	2
56	Doumabango	Gabon North (Minkébé)	Forest	Village	?	Bakwélé	60	2002	2
57	(near Mvadi)		Forest	Camp	30		30	2002	2
58	Esseng		Road	Village	153			2002	2, 3
59	Doumassi		Road	Village	59		100	2002	2, 3
60	(near Doumassi)		Forest	Camp	10		10	2002	2
61	Oveng-Alene		Forest	Village	27		40	2002	2, 3
62	Bitouga		Forest	Village	56		60	2002	2, 3
63	Zangaville		Road	Village	24		24	2002	2, 3
64	Mféfé-nlame		Road	Village	47			1998	4
65	Nkuta		Forest	Camp	38			1998	4
66	Akom		Road	Village	40			1998	4

Source 1: Sato (1992); 2: Matsuura (present study); 3: Mvé (2001); 4: Knight (2003).

**Table 3.** Settlement Size and Distribution of the Bakola.

Site No.	Village	Region	Roadside / Forest	Settlement Type	Population of the Bakola	Neighboring Groups	Total population	Date	Source
67	Etakangai	Gabon Northeast (Mekambo)	Road	Village	60	Bakota Bakwélé Mahongoue	200	2002	1
68	Imbong		Road	Village	50		350	2002	1
69	Ibea		Road	Village	100		?	2002	1
70	Zoula		Road	Village	120		?	2002	1
71	Grand-Itoumbi		Road	Village	50		?	2002	1
72	Mazingo		Road	Village	10		10	2002	1
73	Q·G		Road	Village	60		?	2002	1
74	Mbeza		Road	Village	40		?	2002	1
75	Ekata (two settlements)		Road	Village	400		500	2002	1

Source 1: Matsuura (present study).

## PRESENT SITUATION AND HISTORICAL PROCESS

I describe here in more detail the Babongo settlement distribution and residential pattern in the Boutoumbi area (Table 1, No. 10-16) where I conducted research. The road penetrating the south-central Gabon connects the two principal capitals, Mouila and Koulamoutou. Boutoumbi is situated in the middle of these two towns. There are villages situated at intervals of 5-10 km along the road, and inhabited by the Bantu farmers, the Massango and the Mitsogho, along with the Babongo in the same area.

Except for Mimongo (No. 10), the administrative center of the department with a large population, there are approximately 1400 habitants living along the 50 km stretch between Moukaba (No. 11) and Moukandi (No. 16). If we suppose that the people use the land and forest extending 5 km from the road on both sides,<sup>(2)</sup> the population density is calculated at 2.8 persons/km<sup>2</sup> (1400 persons divided by 500 km<sup>2</sup>).

There are two ethnic groups, namely the Babongo and the Massango, in the villages between Dibandi (No. 12) and Moukandi, except for Boutoumbi (No. 15). The Babongo occupy about a half of the population in these villages. The Babongo build a type of hut similar to those of the Massango, and no spatial separation can be seen between the huts of the two peoples. However, it is always the Massango who become administrative leaders, such as “chef de village,” “chef de regroupement,”<sup>(3)</sup> and “chef de canton.”

Boutoumbi is a small settlement consisting only of Babongo. As of August 2005, this settlement had eight huts (Fig. 3): five wattle-and-daub huts with mud walls and three with bark walls all thatched with raffia leaves. Tin sheets obtained from abandoned huts are reused to construct huts. There also was an assembly hut where men gathered. Rituals also performed here. There were both deserted huts and huts under construction (Fig. 3), as the residents changed quite frequently. The assembly hut was dismantled in January 2005 and only its frames remained in August.

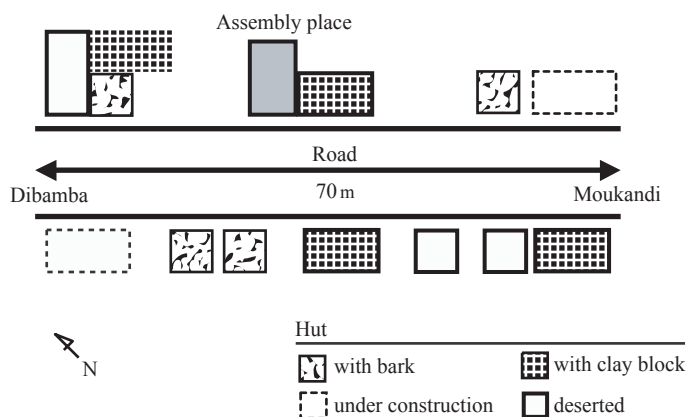


Fig. 3. Sketch of Boutoumbi.



The kinship relations within the Boutoumbi village are given in Fig. 4. Boutoumbi consisted mainly of siblings with their spouses and children. All the members were close relatives. The core members of the village remained the same, whereas other people were more fluid in their residence. People who had married out came with their families to stay for extended periods. Young people were absent from the village for long times. Old widows came to live with their daughters who had married into Boutoumbi. Consequently, it was not easy to identify true members of the village, even if there was any such category. However, there were usually about 30 persons present. Since there was no Massango here, a Babongo man (M1 in Fig. 4) played the role of an administrative chief.

Here I provide a brief summary on the historical changes in the Babongo settlement distribution and population dynamics during the past several decades, based on the information obtained from a Massango man in his sixties born and raised in Moukandi, as well as information from other adults on their life history.

There were 35 settlements in the Department of Ogoulou in 1960, the year of Gabonese independence. The population of each village was approximately 20-200 persons. Villages had been located along the road constructed for commercial purposes in the beginning of the 20th century. The Babongo, who had maintained a symbiotic relationship with the Mitsogho and Massango for a long time, lived in the villages with these farmers, or in the forest camps close to the villages. In the early 1960s, soon after independence, the Gabonese government effectuated a regroupment policy which united several villages. As the population aggregated, all the Babongo who had formerly inhabited the

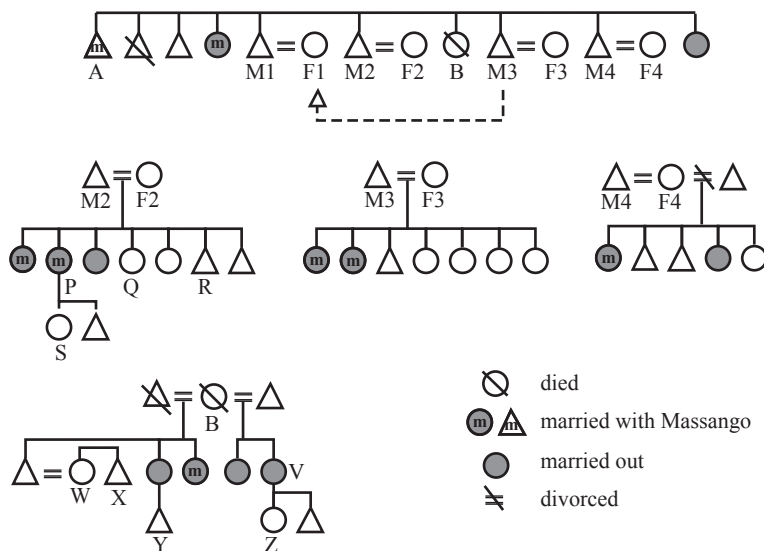


Fig. 4. Kinship among People of Boutoumbi.

forest also came to settle in the roadside villages.

Since independence, the Gabonese national economy has been developing owing to political stability and abundant natural resources such as oil and minerals. In the Boutoumbi area, opportunities for wage labor in gold mining, road construction, and other works have increased. Pumping wells, clinics, primary schools and other modern facilities have also been built. As the circulation of human and material resources were promoted, some young people began to go to towns and settled there. When someone migrated from a village to a town, it was often followed by his/her relative's migration. Some people brought their children to town for post-primary school education. Along with such individual population movements, there were epidemic diseases from 30 to 40 years ago that resulted in a population decrease in the area. This occurred notably among the Mitsogho and the Massango.

The lifestyle of Babongo has also changed. While agriculture had already been practiced to some extent by some Babongo in the early 20th century, it has become more intensive as well as extensive since then. Gun hunting for commercial purposes has accelerated in parallel with an escalation of the commodity economy. However, there are not many Babongos who move to towns and/or engage in wage labor. While Babongo children have started to attend primary school, few go to the towns for higher education.

In the historical process of change, it has been suggested that in the last several decades the Babongo have rapidly expanded communication with the outside world and adopted a modern lifestyle which the Massango had adopted much earlier. The Massango took advantage of visiting relatives who moved to towns and obtained from them manufactured goods, which is different from the situation of the Babongo who have no relatives in towns. However, with regard to village life, differences have been decreasing as the Babongo rapidly change their lifestyle and social system. I will now examine the present situation of Babongo lifestyle and social relationships.

## ECONOMY AND SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

The Babongo in Boutoumbi live principally by agriculture. They mainly cultivate cassava as well as maize, plantain banana, and peanuts. Most of these can be eaten after simple preparation, either boiling, steaming, or roasting. All the families possess their own fields and engage in independent and continuous cultivation. Cassava occupies the largest proportion of the principal food. People harvest and eat it almost everyday.

Hunting, gathering and fishing are also carried out. There are two types of hunting: spear hunting by a group using dogs, and snare hunting by a single hunter or a small group of hunters. By these hunting methods, hunters capture small to medium-sized animals such as rodents and forest duikers. Although no one owns a gun, traders come occasionally from nearby towns like Mimongo and ask Babongo hunters to hunt lending them a gun, cartridges, and torches

for nocturnal hunting. They hunt primarily for monkeys and medium-sized mammals with the gun and the game is given to the traders. In return for the labor, hunters get one animal or cash.

The Babongo gather honey, edible insects, plants, and a variety of fruit and mushrooms in the forest. They also bail fish and catch crabs in a small stream near the village. Sometimes, they poison the water in small streams with some toxic plants and capture small-sized fish. Foodstuff procured by hunting-gathering and fishing are consumed as a snack or side dish for protein.

I examine below Babongo subsistence with quantitative data on the diet at the house I stayed for two research periods: (1) November 2004 to February 2005, (2) May to August 2005. The diet consisted of the principal starchy food and an accompanying side dish mainly for protein. The source of each dish was classified by the type of subsistence activity that produced it (Fig. 5). During the research period, 138 dishes were served as a principal food, of which 91% were produced by farming. In particular, cassava accounted for as much as 75%. On the other hand, 126 dishes were served as an accompanying side dish, of which hunting provided more than a half of the proportion (52%), followed by farming (24%), gathering (15%), fishing (6%), and purchase and gift (3%). Thus while the Babongo obtained their principal food from agriculture, they depended on hunting-gathering and fishing, as well as farming for procuring food for the side dish. It is interesting to see that meat from the forest occupies an important position in the diet.

I interviewed 12 males and 11 females of adult and adolescent age on their daily subsistence activities for 38 days from 7 June to 27 July 2005. Every evening I asked the people who were at the village about the activities they performed during the day. Those staying at other villages or forest camps at the time of research were not included in this set of data.

Several kinds of activities are often combined in a day: collecting honey while searching for animals in spear hunting, or patrolling traps on the way to the cultivated field, for example. However, I targeted and sampled the principal purpose of the activities of the day. In case someone departed for an activity more than twice, I counted each departure as one session. For example,

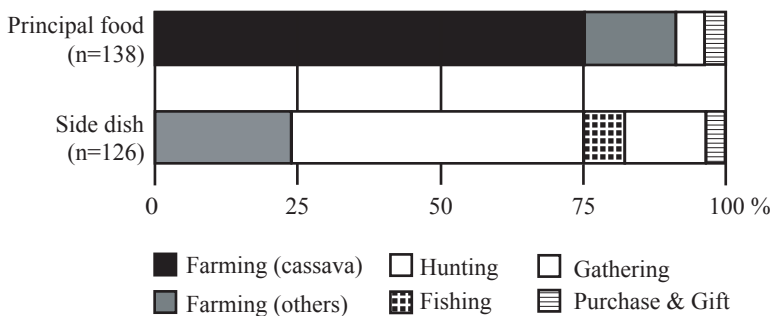


Fig. 5. Proportion of Source of Diet.

gathering palm wine, returning in the morning, and going to the field to harvest cassava on the same day were counted as two sessions.

The time required for each activity varied. Clearing the forest and spear hunting took almost an entire daytime, while gathering palm wine and patrolling animal traps could be finished in 1-2 hours at the longest. While the actual working time for each activity varied depending on the situation, I simply classified the activity types into three, based on the time it took: (A) activities from morning to evening (counted as 1 day), (B) activities for half a day (0.5 day), (C) activities taking 1-2 hours (0.25 day). The labor was calculated by multiplying the working days and persons. In total, the labor was 99.0 person-days for men, and 129.0 person-days for women. I classified all the activities recorded during the research into the above three types and calculated the labor for each activity (Table 4). The proportion of each type of subsistence activity is shown in Table 4. The most important activity is farming, to which nearly a half of labor (46%) was devoted. Hunting (25%), gathering (13%), and fishing (8%) followed in this order. Among men, hunting was most important activity (40%) followed by farming (31%). Men carried out gathering (18.7%) relatively longer than women. In contrast, farming occupied the first place (56%) among women. Although women went hunting with men, their proportion for hunting was not large. Instead, they spent more time fishing (12%) than men (3%). From the results of daily subsistence activities, it became clear that the major

**Table 4.** Amounts of Labor for Each Activity Type.

Activities	Activity Type*	Labor [person-day (%)]		
		Male	Female	Total
Farming		31.00 (31%)	72.25 (56%)	103.25 (46%)
Clearing plant	A	28.00	50.00	78.00
Cutting tree	A	2.00	5.00	7.00
Planting and harvesting cassava, peanuts, banana	B	1.00	17.25	18.25
Hunting		39.75 (40%)	17.75 (14%)	57.50 (25%)
Spear hunting	A	33.00	16.00	49.00
Gun hunting	B	2.50		2.50
Patrolling and setting snares	C	4.25	1.75	6.00
Gathering		18.50 (19%)	11.00 (9%)	29.50 (13%)
Gathering profitable plants	A	4.00		4.00
Collecting nuts	B	1.50	2.50	4.00
Collecting honey	B	6.50	1.50	8.00
Collecting firewood, bark, vine, medical plants	C	2.75	5.75	8.50
Gathering palm wine	C	3.75	1.25	5.00
Fishing (Bailing and collecting crab)	A	3.00 (3%)	16.00 (12%)	19.00 (8%)
Visiting other villages	B	5.00 (5%)	4.00 (3%)	9.00 (4%)
Others		1.75 (2%)	8.00 (6%)	9.75 (4%)
Constructing house	B	1.00	0.50	1.50
Drawing water	C	0.75	5.25	6.00
Washing clothes	C		1.50	1.50
Putting manioc in the water	C		0.75	0.75
Total		99.00 (100%)	129.00 (100%)	228.00 (100%)

\* A = 1 day; B = 0.5 day; C = 0.25 day

subsistence activity of the Babongo was farming, combined with hunting, gathering, and fishing as complementary subsistence activities.

There is no data available on the accurate volume of food from each activity. However, I provide below some examples from my observations. In farming, two to four women often work together almost every day for 1-2 hours to obtain approximately 10 kg of cassava. The labor is sufficient for two to four families to consume cassava as the principal food. The following is an example of how women harvested cassava. Notations coincide with those of Fig. 4.

#### Example 1

Date: 14 December 2004

Members: 2 adult females (V with a baby and W), 1 young girl, 1 child (Z)

8:45 Departed from Boutoumbi and went down the mountain slope.

9:05 Arrived at the cassava field. V and W started to dig cassava. The girl took care of Z and V's baby.

9:50 V came back because the baby began to cry. The girl took V's place.

10:25 W came back with cassava.

10:35 The girl also came back with cassava. Finally, plenty of cassava was harvested and put into a carrying basket. Everyone bathed in a small river nearby.

10:45 Left for Boutoumbi.

11:10 Arrived at Boutoumbi.

Not only the tubers but young leaves of cassava are consumed. When meat or fish is not obtained, young leaves are eaten as a side dish. Most of agricultural products which account for 23.8% of the side dish are young leaves of cassava.

Throughout my research on daily activities, I counted snare hunting 19 times including both setting the traps and patrolling, spear hunting 14 times, and gun hunting 5 times. I examined the participants, the number of game captured and the efficiency of each hunting method (Table 5). Participants denote the total number of adults and adolescents excluding children under 10 years old. The participants for snare hunting were 1.68 persons on average, and usually a man, sometimes with his wife. Spear hunting was done by a group of multiple men and women, with an average of 6.21 participants. All the gun hunting was done solely by an adult man. The total number of game from snare hunting, spear hunting, and gun hunting were 4, 18, and 8, respectively. Hunting efficiency

**Table 5.** Summary of Hunting Activities.

Methods	Times of tour	Average number of participants*	Game captured		
			Total capture	Head / tour	Head / tour-participant
Snare	19	1.68	4	0.21	0.13
Spear	14	6.21	18	1.29	0.21
Gun	5	1.00	8	1.60	1.60

\* Excluding children under ten years of age.

was 0.21 head/tour for snare hunting, 1.29 head/tour for spear hunting, and 1.60 head/tour for gun hunting. The captured game per time-person is calculated at 0.13 for snare hunting, 0.21 for spear hunting, and 1.60 for gun hunting.

In some cases of snare hunting, the hunters could not obtain any game on the day they patrolled the traps. On the other hand, they could catch at least one animal with spear hunting during the research period, although it usually took a long time from morning till evening and required many participants. Therefore, the average efficiency for spear hunting is not very high despite a great input. Although gun hunting is the most efficient and had the highest success rate, much of the game was handed over to traders. Regardless of hunting method, game was distributed not only among the hunting participants but also to their relatives and other people in the village. As a result, one person can gain approximately 100-200 g of meat from one hunting session. The meat from hunting thus provides the Babongo with protein, but not sufficient energy.

Foodstuff obtained from fishing is less than that from hunting. In general, a group mainly consisting of women goes to the small streams for bailing fish and spends the entire daytime. They catch small fish and crabs and put them in a small basket. They distribute the fish and crabs within the family. The following is an example of how fishing was conducted by one family in Boutoumbi. Notations coincide with those of in Fig. 4.

#### Example 2

Date: 29 December 2004

Members: 1 adult man (M2), 3 adult women (F2 with a baby, P with a baby, Q), 2 boys(R, S)

7:07 Departed from Boutoumbi.

8:25 Arrived at the small stream in the forest.

8:30-10:40 Found a burrow of giant rats and dug the burrow. P played the principal role. No game captured.

10:40-12:20 M2 set traps. F2, P, Q, R bailed fish in a small stream, catching eight crabs and small fish to fill a quarter of a basket with a diameter of 20 cm.

12:25 Everyone took a small rest and bathed in a river in the forest.

13:03 Left for Boutoumbi.

13:20 Arrived at Boutoumbi.

From the above description, it is shown that the Babongo subsist mainly on farming and depend heavily on agricultural produce, although they also gained forest products from hunting, gathering, and fishing throughout the research.

## RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY AND VISITING ACTIVITIES

In Boutoumbi, people live sedentarily in the village throughout the year. While they often visit other villages to attend ceremonies and meetings, or to visit relatives, they usually return in a few days. They also go to the forest camps and stay there for a few days for hunting and gathering. I recorded the place where people spent the night everyday for four men (M1-4 in Fig. 4) and four women (F1-4 in Fig. 4) in three periods: (1) 83 days from 1 August to 22 October 2004, (2) 73 days from 1 December 2004 to 11 February 2005, and (3) 61 days from 1 June to 31 July 2005. The result is shown in Fig. 6.

The eight people spent about 80% of their days in Boutoumbi, 5-10% in other villages, and around 10% in a forest camp during the three periods. Although the Babongo stay at camp relatively often in the dry season, in July and August when it is suitable for camping and hunting, more than 70% of the days were spent at Boutoumbi even in this season by the eight people.

I examined the visits (V1-V20) by the eight people and camping trips (C1-C21) by all the Boutoumbi people (Tables 6 & 7). Listed in the tables are the periods, destinations, purposes, and participants for visits to other villages. Periods and participants are listed for camping trips. Not all the participants traveling together depart and arrive at the same time. Some join afterward and others return to the village earlier. Therefore, I defined here participants as any person who stayed at the destination villages or camps with other members at least for one day. I also defined periods as days from the first day to the day when the last participant returned to Boutoumbi. In visits to other village for a ceremony, it was difficult to determine the participants because people assembled from many villages. Therefore, I counted only the Boutoumbi people as participants for visits to other villages. For camping, participants include the people from other villages.

The neighboring four villages accounted for 75% (15/20) of destinations for visits to other villages. Major purposes of such visits were mostly funerals (13 cases), followed by visiting relatives (3 cases). While a few persons went

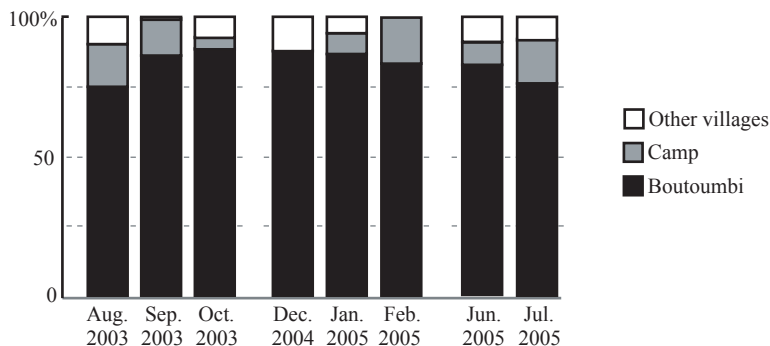


Fig. 6. Monthly Change in the Proportion of Person-day Spent at Each Location.

**Table 6.** Stays at Camps.

Cases	Period		Days	Number of Participants					
				Adult		Adolescent		Children	Total
				Male	Female	Male	Female		
C1	2-6	Aug. 2003	5	4	6	2	3	4	19
C2	1-7	Sep. 2003	7	1	2	3	1	1	8
C3	9-11	Sep. 2003	3	1	4		2	4	11
C4	17-21	Sep. 2003	5	3	6		3	4	16
C5	13-14	Oct. 2003	2	2	1		1	2	6
C6	21-?	Oct. 2003	2 +	2	1		1	1	5
C7	5-8	Dec. 2004	4	1	2	1	1		5
C8	14	Jan. 2005	1	3	3	1		2	9
C9	19-23	Jan. 2005	5	2	3			2	7
C10	24-27	Jan. 2005	4	1	2		1	1	5
C11	5-8	Feb. 2005	4	2	2				4
C12	8-?	Feb. 2005	4 +		2	3			5
C13	29-31	May 2005	3	2	3		1	1	7
C14	5-6	Jun. 2005	2	1	1	1	2	1	6
C15	10-11	Jun. 2005	2	3	3		2	1	9
C16	16	Jun. 2005	1	4	4		2	4	14
C17	17	Jun. 2005	1	2	2	3	2	3	12
C18	27-28	Jun. 2005	2	2	2		2	1	7
C19	2-6	Jul. 2005	5	2	2		2	1	7
C20	25	Jul. 2005	1	1	5	2	2	2	12
C21	26-?	Jul. 2005	10 +	3	6	3	1	3	16
Mean			3.2 *	2.0	3.0	0.9	1.4	1.8	9.1

\* excluding C6, C12 &amp; C21.

**Table 7.** Stays at Other Villages.

Cases	Period	Days	Destination	Pourpose	Number of Participants					
					Adult		Adolescent		Children	Total
					Male	Female	Male	Female		
V1	16-20 Aug. 2003	5	Mouila	Independence ceremony	4	4				8
V2	13 Sep. 2003	1	Dibamba	funeral	2	3		1	1	7
V3	17-18 Oct. 2003	2	Mounongo	funeral	1	3				4
V4	17-20 Oct. 2003	3	Diyanga	funeral	2	2		1	1	6
V5	7 Dec. 2004	1	Moukandi	funeral		2	1	4	4	11
V6	8-13 Dec. 2004	6	Dibamba	funeral	5	6	4	3	7	25
V7	16 Dec. 2004	1	Mimongo	official work	1					1
V8	22 Dec. 2004	1	Diyanga	visiting family	1					1
V9	25 Dec. 2004	1	Moukandi	funeral	1	3	1	1	2	8
V10	25-27 Dec. 2004	3	Mimongo	shopping	1	1		2		4
V11	1-2 Jan. 2005	2	Moukandi	new year party	4	7	1	3	4	19
V12	31 Jan. 2005	1	Moukandi	funeral	3	6	3	3	6	21
V13	18-20 May 2005	3	Diyanga	funeral	3	5	2			10
V14	25 Jun. 2005	1	Moukandi	funeral	5	8	4	1	3	21
V15	2-4 Jun. 2005	3	Dibamba	visiting family	1	1				2
V16	7-9 Jul. 2005	3	Koulamoutou	funeral	2		1			3
V17	14-15 Jul. 2005	2	Boulembou	visiting family		1	1	1		3
V18	16 Jul. 2005	1	Diyanga	funeral	2	2	2		1	7
V19	20-21 Jul. 2005	2	Dibamba	funeral	2	2	3		1	8
V20	23 Jul. 2005	1	Dibamba	funeral	2	4	4	1	1	12
Mean		2.1			2.1	3.0	1.4	1.1	1.6	9.1



together to visit relatives (V8; V15; V17), many people, in fact almost all the villagers participated in funerals and other ceremonies (V6; V11; V12; V14). Stays were 1-5 days, 2.1 days on average, in other villages. In general, a neighboring village was visited for a funeral for a few days.

Camping was carried by 1-4 families (mean=9.1 persons). Where I could record exact periods, people stayed 1-7 days (mean = 3.17 days) at a camp. Such short-term camping took place in the forest near Boutoumbi. People go camping for gathering and fishing, and in particular for hunting. In this sense, camping is a part of the subsistence strategy. Camping is also associated with some kinds of ritual events. Table 6 and Table 7 show that many camping trips preceded funerals (C2→V2; C5→V3, V4; C7→V6; C10→V12; C16, C17→V13). If someone decides to hold a ceremony, he informs of his intention to his relatives and others in the neighboring villages several weeks before the intended date. Participants have to prepare meat, alcoholic drink and other food for the feast. Consequently, people go camping to hunt or seek honey and come back just before the ceremony.

To summarize, while the people in Boutoumbi spend most days in the village, they occasionally visit other villages and camps for a few days for some specific purposes. Camping was not a long term foraging expedition, but a short visit to the forest near the village for acquiring forest products. One notable fact was that the eight people I studied were all mature, 40-60 years old, and had their durable huts in Boutoumbi. They may naturally have a strong feeling of belonging to Boutoumbi. I sensed a tendency that young people who were not as established in Boutoumbi stayed at the village for a relatively shorter period. They spent longer time camping and staying at other villages. They usually lived sedentarily when they got married, building their durable huts and having children.

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONSHIPS

The original kinship system of the Babongo is no longer maintained. They have adopted the matrilineal kinship from the Massango and share the clan systems with them. They choose patrilocally in principle. Although most women marry out as shown in Fig. 4, there is no strict rule for post-marital residence, which depends on the situation. For example, some live matrilocally because the wife's family is richer, whereas some others choose neither spouse's birthplace because the husband works elsewhere.

Close kin are tightly bonded whether they are related patrilineally or matrilineally. As I mentioned, the core members of Boutoumbi consist of seven siblings with their spouses and children (Fig. 4). It is important to maintain a close relationship among them for mutual support and infant care. For example, a young boy (X in Fig. 4) moved into Boutoumbi when his sister married, Y and Z are still quite young but separated from their mothers and taken care of by their grandmother's brother and his wife (M1, F1) who live in

Boutoumbi. In addition, the kinship also plays a part in the distribution of food and other resources, purchased goods and in holding ceremonies. Their kinship terminology is classificatory: the father's brothers are called "fathers," the mother's sisters, "mothers," and cross and parallel cousins, "brothers or sisters." In this way, relatives are bonded with one another through the extensive kinship network.

The kinship relations extend beyond the ethnic boundary of the Babongo through the intermarriage. As shown in Fig. 4, intermarriage between the Babongo and the Massango are quite normal. I recorded 79 married couples<sup>(4)</sup> in Boutoumbi, Moukandi, and Dibamba villages, which showed no indication of a preference between a Babongo spouse and a Massango spouse. Of these couples, 31 (39%) were "intra-marriage among the Massango," 22 (28%) were "intra-marriage among the Babongo," and 26 (33%) were "intermarriage between the Massango and the Babongo." Thus, about a half of the Babongo married a Massango.

Moreover, there is a unique feature that has seldom been observed among other forest peoples: the intermarriage of Babongo men and Massango women. For example, a Babongo man (A in Fig. 4) had a close tie with a Massango man through exchange of goods and services. After the death of his Massango friend, A took in his Massango wife. Such intermarriages may have taken place for a long time and has become normal today. Among the 79 couples, six (8%) were Babongo husbands and Massango wives. Although the proportion is smaller than that of the couples with Massango husbands and Babongo wives, the intermarriage between Babongo men and Massango women is not exceptional.

The intimate relationship between the Babongo and the Massango is found not only in such structural aspect as marriage but also in their daily life. One example is their language practice. Although the Babongo have their own original language of Babongo, they normally speak the language of Massango even among the Babongo themselves. Some even hold that the Massango language is "their" language. They also have adopted the Massango greeting manners and naming system.

The Babongo also share several rituals with the Massango. They must become members of the ritual associations called mwiri for men and nyembe for women. These are originally borrowed from the Massango. However, unlike other forest peoples in central Africa who are "guided" by the neighboring farmers in ritual affairs, Babongos are not forced to be initiated to this ritual association. At present, the Babongo consider the ritual as important and observe the ritual rules as strictly as the Massango do. Sometimes, the Babongo execute the ritual independently and play the major roles in it themselves.

Between the Babongo and Massango, there are neither inherited ties nor pseudo-kinship bonds unlike the relationships of other forest peoples with their neighbors. While they exchange wild resources from hunting-gathering for agricultural products, there is no mutually dependent relationship. Nor is a patron-client relationship seen. Clearing the forest is an exceptional case

when someone asks others for cooperation, because it is laborious work. The host demands some people to work for him, and provides them with meals in reward for their labor. However, employers are not always the same persons. Since many people clear the forest in the dry season, everyone may become both employer and employee. Although there is a tendency that the Massango become employers more often because they have larger fields, it is by no mean unilateral. When Massango men stayed at Boutoumbi, the Babongo asked them to work in their fields.

I summarize here the social systems of the Babongo. They have adopted the matrilineal kinship (but with patrilocal residence) and the clan systems of the Massango. The Babongo also share the language and the ritual practices with the Massango. However, the Babongo are not subordinate to the Massango. As seen in intermarriages and daily interactions, they are equals. They have established a relatively equal bilateral relationship in which differences between them are made invisible.

## DISCUSSION

### I. Sedentary Lifestyle

From the settlement distribution and the residential pattern, it is clear that the Babongo today lead a sedentary life along the road. Their huts are similar to those built by the neighboring Bantu peoples. Their residential mobility and visiting activities showed that they stayed mostly at the village, sometimes visiting other villages and going to camps for a few days.

According to Kitanishi (1995), some Aka in Congo spend more than 80% of their time in the forest camp in the dry season. Yasuoka (2006) reported on the Baka in southeastern Cameroon that they stayed approximately 50% of their time at the village and the remaining 20-50% at the camp. Moreover, they often go into the forest on foraging expeditions for more than a month. Compared with them, the Babongo lead a highly sedentary lifestyle.

What has made the Babongo sedentarized? One of the factors closely related to sedentarization is the introduction and intensification of agriculture. As I mentioned, the principal subsistence activity of the Babongo is agriculture. They depend heavily on cassava and other crops grown by themselves, and spend much time farming. As they procure a stable food supply from farming, the importance of hunting and gathering has gradually decreased in their subsistence economy. At the same time, they must continuously maintain their own fields, which makes it difficult for them to be absent from the village for extended periods.

Another factor is the influence from the outside world. The policy in the 1960s by the Gabonese government accelerated Babongo sedentarization. As the roads were constructed and the traffic increased in the region, the trading of bushmeat and other forest resources also became more frequent, and contacts

with traders increased on the roadside. On the other hand, the Babongo came to be more interested in school education, and sent their children to schools. They also began to take part in the national politics, registering their names in the electoral list. All these changes facilitated their sedentarization.

I list some examples here to illustrate the influence from the outside world on the Babongo life. One day, a client came to Boutoumbi to seek traditional medical treatment. However, most people had gone from the village to camp in the forest. A young man who remained in the village went to the camp to call the people back to the village. They cut short their camping because of this client. On another occasion, people in the camp returned to the village because a political assembly was going to be held for a Government Minister. When the Minister arrived at the village, almost all the people gathered at the village to welcome him and listen to him. It is difficult for the Babongo today to spend a long time in the forest, away from external influences. They are closely linked to the people in neighboring villages and to the national political and administrative process today.

## II. Social Relationships

While the Babongo's sedentary lifestyle has been promoted by the infiltration of agriculture and the influence from the outside world, it is also the Massango who have played an important role in this process. Without the intimate relationship with the Massango, the Babongo may not have developed their sedentary lifestyle. I will therefore discuss the interethnic relationship between the Babongo and Massango.

The Babongo have adopted the Massango kinship and clan systems. There are more intermarriages between them, compared with other forest peoples in central Africa. Among the Aka in Congo, intermarriage with the neighboring farmers is strongly avoided, and sexual relationships are usually denied by the farmers, even if they actually exist (Takeuchi, 2001; Hanawa, 2004). According to my own observation on the Baka in southeastern Cameroon, only three out of 140 Baka women married farmer men. The Efe in DRC also have a high intermarriage rate (Terashima, 1987; 1996). The intermarriage index (IMI), the number of forest peoples' women married to farmers divided by the total number of wives of farmers' wives, is 0.25-0.28 among the Efe area (Terashima, 1987). The IMI for my study area is 0.39 (20/51), higher than that for the Efe area. According to Terashima (1987), the high IMI for the Efe is related to their socio-ecological system, in that Efe women are, as it were, exchanged for agricultural products of the neighboring farmers. On the contrary, there is no such exchange system between the Babongo and Massango. In addition, marriages between Babongo men and Massango women are also found, which has not been reported from other forest peoples.

The Babongo also share the language and rituals with the Massango. Language sharing is seen among the Mbuti in DRC (Ichikawa, 1982). Generally, it is well known that the forest peoples speak the neighboring

peoples' languages. Compared with the Mbuti, the difference is that the Mbuti have already lost their original language in the historical process, whereas the Babongo have maintained their's. While other forest peoples speak their neighbors' language only to communicate with them, the Babongo speak the Massango language even among themselves, and the younger generation uses it as a mother tongue.

The forest peoples often perform rituals with their neighbors. Some conduct the circumcision rite jointly with neighboring farmers, and liven up the ceremony by singing and dancing performances (Turnbull, 1957; Terashima, 1996; Rupp, 2003; Joiris, 2003). However, the case of the Babongo is fundamentally different, in that the Babongo not only participate in cooperation and assistance but play important roles in these rituals practiced independently for their own sake. The Babongo has a clear idea of the rituals.

Between the Babongo and Massango, there are neither individual and familial bonds, nor the pseudo kinship which the Mbuti, Efe and Aka have with their neighboring farmers (Terashima, 1985; 1998; Takeuchi, 2001; Hanawa, 2004). Any sort of a mutually dependent relationship based on economic exchange is not found between the Babongo and Massango. In southeastern Cameroon, the Baka frequently labored for the neighboring farmers in return for money, alcoholic drinks, cloths, and other goods. However, such exchanges have not been observed between the Babongo and Massango.

It is true that the Babongo and Massango are not actually equal in social and economic terms. The Massango situation is advantageous over the Babongo in certain respects: the Massango have much more frequent interaction with the modern society where they obtain cash and manufactured goods; they possess larger fields, partly because of their richer experience with agriculture; and many Massango perform important roles as administrative leaders and representatives, due to their school education. The inequality is also evident in the assimilation process itself in which the Babongo acculturate themselves to the Massango system and not vice versa.

However, taking such observations into consideration, it seems that the Babongo's social discrimination by the neighboring farmers has been much alleviated or at least made less visible, and that they appear to be more assimilated to the neighboring society.

Then, why are seemingly equal relationships with the neighboring farmers not observed among other forest peoples? Many complicated factors are involved in this problem, and situations differ even among the Babongo, depending on the social and economic circumstances. It is a difficult issue, but I will briefly point out some factors.

First, there is obviously a political factor. The Babongo have increased their relationships with the outside world after the sedentarization policy in the 1960s. The Babongo have also enjoyed favorable treatment by the Gabonese policy, as they are the forest people. They have obtained a political position by being given a post of the administrative leader and suffrage.

Secondly, there is an economic factor. The Babongo have embrace the trading

of bush meat and useful plants which has accelerated since the construction of roadnetworks in their region. The increase in industrial activities, such as logging and mining by foreign companies, provided the Babongo with opportunities for wage labor. The Babongo's economic power has thus gradually improved through these processes.

Thirdly, the culture of the Babongo as viewed by their neighbors, reflected to some extent in their social and economic aspects, also play a part in this issue. Generally, the Gabonese people acknowledge that the forest peoples have a rich knowledge about useful plants and traditional medical treatment. The example of a visitor coming to the Babongo for treatment mentioned above illustrates well such an importance assigned to them as specialists of traditional healing. Their special healing power, which even some Gabonese with higher social status trust, may have helped the Babongo to be accepted socially by other peoples.

The above are just a few among other possible reasons for the unique and relatively equal position of the Babongo in a regional society. Many other forest peoples today, as the Baka in Cameroon, have also shifted to sedentary life and increased their contacts with the outside world, but they are not as equal as the Babongo. Such a difference may partly be related to the differences in the social system of their neighbors. The social status of the forest peoples is largely influenced by the relationships with their neighboring farmers, so I will discuss lastly the influence of the Massango social system on the assimilation process of the Babongo.

What is important is the kinship system. While other farmers neighboring to the forest peoples in central Africa reportedly have a patrilineal kinship system with patrilocal post-marital residence, the Massango have a matrilineal system with patrilocal residence. In most cases, intermarriage between the forest peoples and their neighbors takes the form of "hypergamy" in which women of the forest people marry farmer men because of the lower economic and political status of the former. In the patrilineal system with patrilocal residence, a child born to the marriage belongs to the father's side, i.e., the farmer groups and is raised in the farmer community. On the contrary, when the neighboring farmers have a matrilineal system with patrilocal residence, a child belongs to the forest people's side, but is raised in farmer community. Through this process, the forest people may adopt the farmer lifestyle more readily. As such intermarriages increase, it facilitates more intermarriages by providing them with a sort of handhold that bonds the forest people to their neighbors. This is one possible explanation of the process of the decreasing inter-ethnic difference and assimilation.

How about then the future of Babongo-Massango relationship? From the present situation of accelerated assimilation, it is difficult to imagine that they would become more socially segregated from each other. They may become indistinguishable through this accumulative process which involves increasing daily interaction with intimate relationships.

However, one thing is to be noted. The social relationships are not formed



in a closed world. There are a variety of national and global processes that bring about the increasing circulation of people, goods and information, thereby connecting local society with the outside world. For example, diamond mining and logging operations have started in my research area, and people here will probably soon use telephones and electricity.

In the globalization process, some minority groups have been much more marginalized and discriminated against, however invisible it may seem, whereas other minority groups have gained priority and apparently improved their social status. Therefore, it is important for us to understand the interethnic relations not only as the dyadic relation between the Babongo and Massango, but also in relation to a wider society, national as well as international.

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## NOTES

- (1) The central African forest hunter-gatherers generally known as "Pygmies."
- (2) This calculation is based on my observation of two camping trips. The distance of the camp sites from the road was 4.3 km and 5.7 km. However, it is possible that the Babongo use a much larger range.
- (3) A leader for several villages united by regroupment policy.
- (4) Several cases of remarriage, divorce, and polygamous marriage are included.

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